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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 CHIANG MAI 000229

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PGOV TH KDEM

SUBJECT: OPPOSITION CARRIES PICHIT ELECTION WITH MONEY, EMOTION

REF: BANGKOK 6119

CLASSIFIED BY: Bea Camp, Consul General, Chiang Mai, State.

REASON: 1.4 (b)

11. (C) SUMMARY. A surprising Oct. 30 victory by the opposition candidate in a by-election in northern Phichit province that pit the sons of two powerful families in a bitter turf war between two powerful and connected political families in a province known nationally for a legacy of organized crime. By all accounts, the opposition's goal is still within reach (see Bangkok 6119).

12. (U) Tuesday reports showed Siriwat Kachornprasart, son of Mahachon Party leader Gen. Sanan Kachornprasart, winning the Phichit constituency with a 39,000 to 22,000-vote lead over his TRT rival, Nawin Bc Adul Boonset won a 2,600-vote victory in the national election last February, but was one of three candidates to receive a "yellow card" from the Election Commission over this weekend's results and the prospect of more yellow cards, mean that the opposition's goal is still within reach (see Bangkok 6119).

13. (C) Local and national media hyped the Phichit race as a bitter turf war between two powerful and connected political families in a province known nationally for a legacy of organized crime. By all accounts, the opposition's goal is still within reach (see Bangkok 6119).

14. (C) In Phichit and elsewhere, TRT launched an all-out campaign to defend its three yellow-carded MPs using the party's ample financial resources, cadre of celebrity figures, and influence over national media. Thai Rak Thai's Advantages Apparently Not Enough

15. (C) Thaksin visited the province twice in the run-up to the vote, skirting election laws that forbid campaigning while on official business during business hours. In his final appearance, he appeared to be as close to an actual discussion of issues as voters heard from either side. In public, TRT advertised the power of its status as the dominant political force in the province.

16. (C) TRT's Phichit campaign demonstrated the party's efficient organizational skills, which, like U.S. political parties, allow it to track and collect information on voters and target resources as well as to mobilize its own resources. Sanan's Last Stand

17. (C) But Gen. Sanan showed there is still life in old-style

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bribery and personal campaigning. On the surface Mahachon advertised the race as both a test of Sanan's legacy in his hometown of Phichit and a

18. (C) In the weeks before the election, Sanan publicly staked his future on the outcome of Sunday's election, tearfully threatening to leave the province if his party lost. Mahachon, a party Sanan had

19. (SBU) With February's results nullified, Sanan called in a handful of defeated Mahachon MPs who traveled to Phichit to help their boss stage his last stand. The patriarch then turned to his son Siriwat. Although Siriwat's and Nawin's faces appeared on campaign posters, it was the two fathers that voters heard and saw in the media and it was Sanan

110. (C) In the end, Phichit remained Sanan country. TRT officials tried to argue that their new MPs have delivered more for the province in the last few years than Sanan ever did during his decades-long tenure. Election Officials Miss the Forest for the Trees

111. (C) With each party's price per vote the worst kept secret in town and distrust between TRT and Mahachon leading to allegations of vote-rigging, provincial EC officials told PolOff that they were taking

112. (C) While eager to talk about these ballot box security measures, few officials were prepared to deal with illegal practices that went on before the election or to directly discuss the vote-buying practices

113. (C) According to P-NET, Sanan (and likely TRT) found ways around the loose anti-corruption measures put in place before election day. Local officials announced nighttime police checkpoints to look for

114. (C) Although Adul and Nawin told PolOff Oct. 26 that they would accept the results if they lost, most expect that TRT will push the EC to issue a yellow card to Siriwat. Early media reports, however, suggest

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observer, "the eventual winner will get a chance to win three or four times before taking his seat."

115. (C) COMMENT: Mahachon's win shows that old-style Thai politics, with its vote-buying schemes and personality-driven campaigning can still win against TRT's blend of modern political organization and

116. (C) COMMENT continued: Despite a stronger public anti-fraud tack taken by the EC, Thai politicians continue to find means to circumvent election laws. A system that relies mostly on complaints

CAMP